

Special Edition

Division of Special Education

September, 2007

Comments from Assistant Commissioner Joseph Fisher Positive Behavior Supports

One request for the Tennessee Department of Education from the 2007 General Assembly is to find out the number of school districts currently using Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). This past school year, I had the opportunity to visit many school districts where a major emphasis was placed on PBS. I must say that the data presented to me during these visits have shown what an impact this program has not only on student discipline, but academic achievement as well.

The concept of PBS is rooted in decades of research on how school discipline policies, staff behavior and other school climate issues can be altered to improve student behavior and learning outcomes for **all** students. PBS, also known as positive behavioral

supports, focuses on developing programs that improve student behavior and support social development through more positive approaches that teach appropriate skills, rather than focusing solely on punishing students for inappropriate behavior.

The State Department is currently contracting with RISE at the University of Memphis and the Partnership for EdExcellence at the University of Knoxville for local school district training.

If your school district is interested in pursuing how you can implement this program in your school district, contact Linda Copas, Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education at Linda.copas@state.tn.us or call 615/741-7790 for assistance.



Special Education Conference 2007

This year's Annual Special Education Conference, held at the Airport Marriott in Nashville, was, again, a success. With over 1400 participants the conference attendance continues to grow with each passing year. The attendance swell is attributed, in part, to the increasing variety of sessions being offered,

the opportunity to earn TAASLP credits, and the continuing efforts of department staff to make the conference as comfortable and enjoyable as possible.

Next year's conference is scheduled for February 27, 28 & 29, at the Airport Marriott, in Nashville.

More information and registra-

tion materials will be sent in the near future. In the meantime, if you have any questions or input regarding the conference, please contact Steve Sparks, TN Dept. of Education, Division of Special Education at steve.sparks@state.tn.us or call 615/741-3619.

Inside this issue:

Good Press for TEIS 2

School Age Autism Training 3

Changes in Division of Special Education Staff Responsibility 3

Professional Dev. Sessions for Artists 4

New Law Affects Mediation and Due Process 4

Good Press for TEIS

The following article (released by Vanderbilt University) references the good collaborative efforts TN's Early Intervention system is involved with in relation to Early Identification of Autism.

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Launches Autism Early Identification Program

By Craig Boerner

Autism specialists at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) announced today that a new, multi-pronged program focusing on early identification and intervention for young children with autism is being launched in Nashville.

The program at VKC and TRIAD integrates research, clinical, and training efforts.

A core of Vanderbilt leaders and faculty from diverse training backgrounds—psychology, genetics, neuroscience, and special education—are collaborating for the project, according to TRIAD Director Wendy Stone, Ph.D., also a VKC investigator.

“We are going this because there are more children out there with autism, because more of these children are under 3 years old and because we are still learning the best ways to treat these young children,” Stone said.

The most current estimates are that 1 in every 150 children have autism.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently mandated that children receive screening evaluations at 18 months, 24 months and 30 months but researchers said these mandates are actually ahead of resources available for referrals.

“The mandates are ahead of our knowledge and resources so we have to catch up...and the only way to do that is a full court press,” Stone said.

“We have a very comprehensive, multi-faceted approach at Vanderbilt that includes training pediatricians and providers. We also have a clinic for early identification and research projects for early identification.”

The Screening Tools and Referral Training—Evaluation and Diagnosis (START ED) Program, funded by a grant from the TennCare Bureau to the TN Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (TNAAP), is unique to Vanderbilt and designed to provide commu-

nity-based pediatricians with strategies for evaluating young children for autism within their practices.

“We are very excited that the TennCare Bureau allowed this unique collaboration between practicing pediatricians, autism specialists at Vanderbilt and Tennessee’s Early Intervention System (TEIS) to address the very real need to provide early and accurate autism diagnosis right in the child’s own community,” said Quentin Humberd, M.D., Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician Chief for the Exceptional Family Member Program at Blanchfield Army Community Hospital.

“The increase in autism screening recommended by the AAP is creating demands for a more timely evaluation and at present there are just not enough resources to provide these assessments. This pilot is designed to give community pediatricians the tools and skills to make an accurate assessment of a young child with suspected autism as well as help them partner with TEIS to develop treatment recommendations that can lead to better outcomes for these children and their families.

Five Middle TN pediatricians are participating in the six-month pilot project to learn how to interact with and observe the children and interview parents for information to make a diagnostic determination.

“I think the real precipitant for pediatrician training is that pediatricians don’t want to tell parents something and then keep them in a state of limbo for a year,” Stone said.

You can be screened at age two and then have to wait a year for a diagnostic evaluation. It is not good care and yet, to not identify them isn’t good care either.”

Pediatricians participate in a two-day training workshop and videotape autism assessments from their own practices to gather feedback.

“We want specialists across the state of TN who can expedite evaluations for kids during this critical time,” said Zachary Warren, Ph.D., chairman of Medical Psychiatry at VKC

“This would serve not only families but also our educational systems, our community-based systems, by really preparing kids and families for more successful entry, more successful adjustment, to school settings and in other areas.”

Other teaching initiatives include Parent Enhancing Interactions (EI) classes to provide teaching and interaction methods within the context of everyday life, and also early intervention academies and workshops to training community professionals to recognize early signs of autism and design and implement specialized intervention activities.

STAT training workshops are also conducted several times per year to teach service providers how to use the Screening Tool for Autism in Two-Year-Olds.

In addition to teaching, VKC will offer clinical services assistance for early identification with a new Infant-Toddler Clinic at Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital.

The clinic, a component of the Parent Support and Education Program (PSEP), offers screening, diagnostic and consultative services for families of young children who are suspected of having autism, or are at elevated risk.

Genetic studies will assess families of children with autism to identify genetic markers that can be used to understand causes and develop treatments.

Research projects for early intervention involve longitudinal follow-up studies to identify early behavioral and physiological markers for autism in young children at risk.

Research projects for early intervention will evaluate the effectiveness of specific treatment approaches for young children with autism, children at risk for autism and their families.

The National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, Autism Speaks, the Marino Autism Research Institute, the Simons Foundation, The TDOE, TNAAP and VKC provide funding for various aspects of this early identification and intervention program.

School Age Autism Training for 2007-2008

During the 2007-2008 school year, the TN DOE will again collaborate with TRIAD of Vanderbilt to provide teacher training to those staff who work with children with autism.

- Training begins in July, with the TRIAD Summer Institute. The Summer Institute provides a four day training in Applied Behavior Analysis, to six teams from across the state. Each team consists of four people who work together to create a plan for a student within their school. The team will be able to use a similar approach for other students.
- The Administrators Academy is a two-day training event that occurs in each region of the state during August. The Academy is designed to educate principals about the characteristics and needs of students with autism so they may structure quality programs in their own schools. A total of forty five administra-

tors can participate.

- Full day workshops are offered in each region of TN twice a year. These workshops cover a variety of topics relating to autism and are open to families, school staff, related service personnel and any other school personnel involved in educating students with autism.
- Three-day TRIAD Teacher Trainings take place throughout the year. These five trainings include Basic K-6, Basic Middle and High School and Advanced K-12 levels. The training uses hands-on experience and the participants receive a site visit in the trainee's setting within two months. Training topics include characteristics, assessment, methodologies, communication, and behavior. The sessions are open to general and special education teachers, speech-language therapists, related service personnel and

behavior consultants. All trainings take place in Nashville. This year, a separate training for Paraprofessionals working with children with autism takes place in October. There is no cost for the teacher training or materials. The only cost to participants is transportation, food and lodging. Participants are chosen on an application basis and a maximum of two people from the same LEA can attend the same training. Because of the hands-on experience, each training is limited to fifteen people.

Special Education Directors who have interested staff may contact Linda Copas, TN Dept. of Education, Division of Special Education at Linda.copas@state.tn.us or call 615/741-7790 for an application.

Changes in Division of Special Education Staff Responsibility

The Department of Education, Division of Special Education, in an effort to more efficiently and effectively serve you in your districts, has made the following staff responsibility changes for the 2007-2008 School Year.

- Donna Parker, who has coordinated professional development for the Division has retired effective June 30.
- Steve Sparks has become Director of State Reporting and Professional Development.
- Nan McKerley replaced Ann Hampton as Director of Administrative Services; Nan will continue to work with LEA allocations, budget and finances.
- Ann Hampton will be working (part-time beginning in August) with Division professional development initiatives including ED Excellence, RISE and LINK among others, and with the Department's *Closing the Achievement Gap Work Group*
- Kathi Rowe has become Director of Program Management Services assuming LEA fiscal and TA responsibilities formerly held by Nan McKerley, along with responsibility for Division contract oversight.
- Cara Alexander replaced Steve Sparks as Director of Monitoring and Compliance.
- Kathy Strunk has become Director of Assessment and Intervention Services.
- Calvin Burden becomes Director of Private, Charter, Juvenile Detention and Other Schools replacing Bob Tipps, who has retired.

Davis Hines has become the West TN consultant for this office and will be in the Southwest FSC in Jackson.

Rodney Franks, East TN FSC, will be East TN consultant, and

Mark Reep, Middle TN Resource Services, will serve as consultant for Middle TN.
- Janice Bridwell has moved from the position of Complaints Consultant in Legal Services to the Office of Data Services.
- Kay Flowers has moved from Early Childhood Consultant for Middle TN to the Office of Legal Services to replace Janice as a Complaints Consultant.
- Gayle Feltner, Department of Retardation Services, will be working with the Division in the Office of Early Intervention beginning mid-July.

We ask that you please share the information provided above with staff in your school district. The Department appreciates your efforts to provide all students with disabilities an appropriate education and our staff look forward to working with each of you in the coming school year.

New Law Affects Mediation and Due Process

By Bill Wilson, Director Legal Services



Special education dispute resolution procedures were the subject of action during the first session of the 105th General Assembly. A new law effective July 1, 2007, mandates that all special education mediations and due process hearings be conducted by mediators and administrative law judges employed by the Tennessee Secretary of State. Training for the mediators and administrative law judges will be provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts. Prior to enactment of the law, mediations and due process hearings were conducted by private mediators and hearing officers on a contract basis with the Division of Special Education, and training was conducted by the Division and private providers. Parents and local education agencies are reminded to contact the Tennessee Secretary of State at 615-741-2078 with mediation and due process hearing requests and questions. New mediation and due process forms are available on the Department of Education's website.



Bill Wilson, Special Education Director of Legal Services.

Division of Special Education

7th Floor Andrew Johnson Tower
710 James Robertson Pkwy.
Nashville, TN 37243

www.state.tn.us/education/speced

The Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education's purpose is to "promote educational services and programs for all Tennessee's children with special education needs that will enable them to lead productive and independent lives."

The Division is committed to systematic planning along with plan implementation, tracking and accountability as a vehicle for providing the leadership necessary for fulfilling this purpose.



**For Comments and Submissions
Contact:**

Christy Ratzlaff
Christy.ratzlaff@state.tn.us
615/741-6444